DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 332 CG 018 425

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TITLE Do Graduate Preparation Progams Address Competencies Important to Student Affairs Practice?
PUB DATE 1 Apr 85
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Portland, OR, March 31-April 3, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; *Competence; *Education Work Relationship; Job Skills; *Masters Degrees; Postsecondary Education; Professional Personnel; Program Effectiveness; Skill Development; *Student Evaluation; *Student Personnel Workers

ABSTRACT

Although much concern has been expressed about the quality of training and preparation of student affairs professionals, no studies have been reported which examine the perceptions of student affairs practitioners and faculty trainers regarding training for specified professional competencies. A national study was conducted to examine the perceptions of selected samples of 91 chief student affairs officers and 94 directors of housing at four-year postsecondary education institutions and 75 faculty members at institutions with departments offering master's programs in student personnel administration. A modification of the Tomorrow's Higher Education model enabled the identification of five competency categories of development: goal setting, consultation, communication, assessment and evaluation, and environmental and organizational management. Respondents rated 33 professional competencies within these categories indicating, for each competency, the extent to which they agreed that recent master's graduates possessed that competency and the extent to which they believed the competency was important for assuming an entry level staff position in student affairs. The results revealed significant differences between faculty and practitioners on graduates' competencies for each of the five categories, and for 29 of the 33 individual competencies. Faculty usually perceived students as possessing the competencies to a greater extent than did practitioners. All three samples rated each of the five categories as essential or important for assuming an entry level position in student affairs. Five data tables are provided. (NRB)

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NASPA CONFERENCE 1985

Portland, Oregon

DO GRADUATE PREPARATION PROGRAMS ADDRESS COMPETENCIES IMPORTANT TO STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE?

CG 018425

Presenter

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South Dakota State University

Date/Time

Monday, April 1, 1985
3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

Location

Marriott - Salon H.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This program will review a recent, national study which addressed graduate preparation programs in relation to professional competencies. The study was designed to examine the perceptions student affairs professionals held of the preparation that recent Master's graduates received for a common core of professional competencies.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Much concern has been identified historically which relates to the quality of training and preparation our new professionals are receiving. Calls for the establishment of standards and accreditation of our preparation programs have been heard more frequently. Previous research has indicated a need for a more cooperative and collaborative relationship between preparation program faculty and practitioners responsible for hiring and supervising recent graduates in their first full-time positions in student affairs. Previous research has also indicated the need for additional research to determine whether preparation programs in student affairs are actually preparing entry-level professionals with the competencies believed important for assuming an entry level position in our field.

No studies have been reported in the literature which investigated the perceptions of both student affairs practitioners and faculty trainers regarding training in preparation programs for specified professional competencies. There has been no published research to support the notion that those hired for student affairs positions possess the specified competencies or whether the preparation programs have prepared their graduates with these competencies.

The primary purposes of this study were to determine whether or not professional preparation programs in student personnel administration educated for development of entry level professional competencies and to determine the relative importance of these competencies for assuming an entry level staff position in the field of student affairs. Three groups of professionals in the field of student affairs were compared to determine if differences existed in their perception of the training graduates with master's degrees received in their preparation programs for the entry level professional competencies. The perceptions of the three groups were also compared to determine if differences existed in the extent to which they perceived the competencies to be important for assuming an entry level professional position in student affairs.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Do recent graduates of master's level preparation programs in student personnel administration enter the field of student affairs with training in entry level competencies a result of their preparation programs?

2. Do chief student affairs officers (CSAOs), director's of housing (DOHs), and faculty (FTs) have similar perceptions of the training recent master's degree graduates of preparation programs in student personnel administration receive for the identified entry level competencies?

3. Is it important for recent master's degree graduates from preparation programs in student personnel administration to have acquired these competencies prior to full time entry into the student affairs field?

4. Do CSAOs, DOHs, and FTs have similar perceptions of the importance of these entry level competencies?

A modification of the Tomorrow's Higher Education (T.H.E.) model, commissioned by the American College Personnel Association and developed by T.J. Miller and J.S. Price in The Future of Student Affairs served as the conceptual framework for this study. Modifications to the T.H.E model enabled the identification of five competency categories of development: goal setting, consultation, communication, assessment and evaluation, and environmental and organizational management. The 33 competencies used in this study were derived from three previous research studies and assigned to the appropriate categories.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The research population for this study included selected samples of chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) and directors of housing (DOHs) at four year public and private post secondary educational institutions and faculty (FTs) employed at institutions with departments offering graduate programs in student personnel administration leading to a master's degree. A random sample of 150 CSAOs was selected from the voting delegate directory of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). One hundred and forty-one DOHs at institutions which house 3000 or more students in university-operated residential facilities were selected from the directory of the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I). One hundred and sixty-two FTs were selected from the Directory of Graduate Preparation programs in College Student Personnel (American College Personnel Association, 1980).

These three samples of student affairs professionals were selected for a number of reasons. Chief Student Affairs Officers maintain overall responsibility for hiring of professional staff in all student affairs departments. The quality of the student affairs staff frequently reflects the level of involvement the CSAO has with the staff. The CSAO approves and supports the expected minimal professional and educational requirements for all professional staff positions in the student affairs division.

Directors of Housing were selected because they represent a student affairs department which frequently maintains a large number of pro-

fessional staff. Housing departments, providing residence facilities for 3000 students or more, hire and provide for a larger number of professional staff than do housing departments which provide facilities for fewer than 3000 students. Studies have shown that more entry level professional positions are available in the housing/residence life department than within the other departments of student affairs.

Faculty were selected primarily because they assume the responsibility for providing the formal, academic and applied preparation in student personnel graduate programs. Their responsibility is to direct the development of graduate students who represent prospective entry level professionals into the student affairs field.

A two-part research instrument was designed and developed for distribution to the 453 student affairs professionals included in this study. Part I of the instrument sought demographic information through 14 questions from FTs and 12 questions from CSAOs and DOHs. Part II of the instrument asked participants to respond, on a four-point Likert scale, to 33 professional competencies. For each competency, participants were asked to indicate a) the extent to which they agreed that recent master's graduates possessed the competency (4-agree strongly, 3-agree, 2-disagree, 1-disagreely strongly) and b) the extent to which they believed the competency was important for assuming an entry level staff position in student affairs (4-essential, 3-important, 2-of little importance, 1-not important). The categories from the modified T.H.E. conceptual model and the 33 competencies utilized in the study included the following:

I. Goal Setting
   1. Write behavioral objectives
   2. Identify and articulate institution's goals and policies to students
   3. Teach students the consequences of their behavior
   4. Engage in systematic planning

II. Consultation
   5. Recognize and use expertise of others
   6. Facilitate group problem solving and group decision making
   7. Facilitate staff development through in-service training.
   8. Work effectively with a diversity of individual students and faculty

III. Communication
   9. Analyze and write memos and reports
   10. Make effective use of verbal and nonverbal skills in group presentations
   11. Perceive and accurately interpret attitudes, beliefs, and needs of others
   12. Represent student concerns to other campus groups
   13. Recognize and define confidentiality practices and procedures
   14. Determine usage of office management procedures (i.e. secretarial services, business machines operation, print and non-print media)

IV. Assessment and Evaluation
15. Assess student needs
16. Analyze and interpret program needs and requests
17. Design student programs based on student needs
18. Interpret and understand various evaluation strategies
19. Identify and understand various evaluation strategies
20. Design and implement a program to evaluate staff
21. Revise programs on the basis of evaluation data
22. Recognize and analyze interpersonal problems

V. Environmental and Organizational Management
23. Develop and administer a budget
24. Organize resources (people, material) to carry out program activities
25. Understand institutional mission, objectives, and expectations
26. Know and utilize effective decision making strategies
27. Accept authority and responsibility and delegate as appropriate
28. Identify and utilize available financial resources
29. Mediate conflict among students, campus, and/or community groups
30. Recognize and accept the ethical consequences of personal and professional behavior
31. Select, train, and supervise staff
32. Manage physical resources, and facilities
33. Adjudicate student conduct matters effectively

A breakdown of the rate of return indicated that 75 of 162 (46.3%) FTs, representing 59% of the preparation programs; 94 of 141 (66.7%) DOHs; and 91 of 150 (60.7%) CSAOs returned usable instruments. The data obtained from the responses were analyzed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS), an integrated computer system for data analysis. A frequencies procedure was used to determine percentage of responses to questions in Part I of the instrument. The BMDP program, analysis of variance for repeated measures, and the GLM program for multivariate analysis of variance were appropriately utilized. Duncan's multiple range test was used to do post hoc, pair-wise comparisions between groups where significant differences were indicated.

V. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Possession of the Competencies

Faculty mean scores were above 3.0 for categories of Goal Setting, Consultation, and Communication and above 3.0 for 21 of the 33 individual competencies. Directors of housing mean scores were below 3.0 for all five categories and below 3.0 for 31 of the 33 individual competencies. Chief student affairs officer mean scores were below 3.0 for all five categories and below 3.0 for 29 of the 33 individual competencies.

Significant differences were found between faculty and each of the two practitioner samples on perception of recent graduates' possession of the competencies for each of the five categories. Signifi-

cant differences were obtained for the three samples on 29 of the 33 individual competencies with faculty, in most cases, perceiving possession of the competencies to a greater extent than practitioners. No significant differences were found between the two practitioner samples for possession in any of the five categories.

Importance of the Competencies

Faculty mean scores were above 3.0 for each of the five categories and for 30 of the 33 individual competencies. Directors of housing mean scores were above 3.0 for each of the five categories and for 29 of the 33 individual competencies. Chief student affairs officers mean scores were above 3.0 for each of the five categories and for 28 of the 33 individual competencies on importance.

No significant differences were found among the three population samples in any of the five categories.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study provided general support for the modified T.H.E. model as a conceptual framework for the identification of learning outcomes of preparation programs in student personnel administration. The modified T.H.E. model has shown to be effective in providing a theoretical context for the competencies, proven in this study to be important outcomes of training programs, designed to prepare young professionals to enter the field of student affairs.

The following represent conclusions of this study:

1. The results of the study support the conclusion that the two practitioner groups (DOHs and CSAOs) perceived doubt as to whether recent master's graduates of preparation programs possessed the competencies in any of the categories.

2. The results of the study support the conclusion that the three groups did not share similar perceptions of the training recent master's degree graduates of preparation programs received for the competencies in all categories. Specifically, faculty perceived a significantly greater possession of the competencies by recent graduates in all five categories.

3. The results of the study support the conclusion that all three groups perceived that the competencies in all categories were important for assuming an entry level position in student affairs.

4. The results of the study support the conclusion that the three groups did share similar perceptions of the importance of the competencies in all categories for assuming an entry level position in student affairs.

5. The results of the study support the conclusion that all three groups of student affairs professionals found competencies in the category of Consultation are most likely to be possessed by recent master's graduates of preparation programs in student personnel administration. The three groups also found competencies in the category of Consultation were most important for assuming an entry level position in the field of student affairs.

6. The results of the study support the conclusion that all three groups of student affairs professionals found competencies in the category of Assessment and Evaluation were least important for assuming an entry level position in student affairs.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have raised a number of issues and questions which merit additional consideration and further study. Some of what has been identified in the literature regarding what "ought to be done" is supported by the results of this study.

1. Content analysis of preparation programs in terms of actual job function and job expectations is warranted in an effort to lessen the disparity between training and job performance.

2. Increased attention to the development of skills in the administration and management of higher education on the part of preparation programs is warranted.

3. Collaboration between faculty and practitioners is warranted in developing learning expectations and appropriate measures of the learning outcomes which would reflect the demands of professional positions in the field of student affairs.

4. Demonstration by students of competence in areas agreed to by faculty and practitioners as important in assuming entry level positions in student affairs is warranted.

5. Consideration might be given to an examination of recent graduates' perceptions of their own possession of competencies compared to perceptions of faculty.

6. Further study is warranted to determine if there is an effect on perceptions of possession and importance based on respondent age, length of time employed in the field of student affairs, and/or whether an advanced degree has been earned in the area of higher education.

7. Future studies of professional competencies which would include professionals in other student affairs areas are warranted.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE FOR FACULTY (FTs), DIRECTORS OF HOUSING (DOHs), AND CHIEF STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICER'S (CSAOs)

CHARACTERISTIC	FTs		DOHs		CSAOs		CUMULATIVE	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Institutional Type								
Public	68	90.7	80	85.1	54	59.3	202	77.7
Private	7	9.3	14	14.9	37	40.7	58	22.3
Institutional Enrollment								
Under 5000	4	5.3	0	---	35	38.5	39	15
5000 - 9999	13	17.3	23	24.5	19	20.9	55	21.2
10000 - 14999	12	16	21	22.3	12	15.4	47	18.1
15000 - 20000	12	16	15	16	9	9.9	36	13.9
over 20000	34	45.3	35	37.2	14	15.4	83	31.9
Time at Current Position Level								
Less than five years	13	17.3	51	54.3	34	37.8	98	37.8
5 - 10 years	15	20	22	23.4	29	32.2	66	25.5
11 - 15 years	22	29.3	16	17	14	15.6	52	20.1
more than 15 years	25	33.3	5	5.3	13	14.4	43	16.6

TABLE 1 Continued

CHARACTERISTICS	FTs		DOHs		CSAOs		CUMULATIVE	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Time Employed in Student Affairs Higher Education								
Less than 5 years	2	2.7	4	4.3	2	2.2	8	3.1
5 - 10 years	6	8.2	27	29	7	7.7	40	15.6
11 - 15 years	22	30.1	31	33.3	29	31.9	82	31.9
more than 15 years	43	58.9	31	33.3	53	58.2	127	49.4
Age								
25 - 35 years	3	4	33	35.9	10	11	46	17.8
36 - 45 years	30	40	43	46.7	44	48.4	117	45.4
46 - 55 years	23	30.7	13	14.1	30	33	66	25.6
over 55 years	19	24.3	3	3.3	7	7.7	28	10.9
Highest Earned Degree								
Bachelor's	0	---	4	4.3	0	---	4	1.5
Master's	3	4	56	59.2	26	28.6	85	32.7
Specialist	0	---	0	---	1	1.1	1	.4
Doctorate	72	96	34	36.2	64	70.3	170	65.4

TABLE 1 Continued

CHARACTERISTIC	FTs		DOHs		CSAOs		CUMULATIVE	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Advanced Degree in a Field Related to Higher Education								
Master's								
Yes	47	62.7	71	75.5	60	65.9	178	68.5
NO	28	37.3	23	24.5	31	34.1	82	31.5
Doctorate								
Yes	70	93.3	33	35.1	55	60.4	158	60.8
No	5	6.7	61	64.9	36	39.6	102	39.2
Membership in Professional Association								
ACPA							148	56.9
ACUHO							107	41.2
NASPA							180	69.2
NANDAC							25	9.6
Other							113	43.5

TABLE 2

SPECIFIC PRACTITIONER RESPONDENT (DOH AND CSAO) DATA

Characteristic	DOH N	DOH Percent	CSAO N	CSAO Percent
Number of your staff hired in first professional student affairs job since employed at current position level				
Less than 5	22	23.4	17	19.5
5 - 10	22	23.4	29	33.3
11 - 20	20	21.3	11	12.6
more than 20	30	31.9	30	33.5
Number of your staff hired in first professional student affairs job with master's degree in field related to higher education.				
Less than 5	26	28.3	21	24.7
5 - 10	25	27.2	29	34.1
11 - 20	17	18.5	16	18.8
more than 20	24	26.1	19	22.4

TABLE 3

SPECIFIC FACULTY RESPONDENT (FT) DATA

CHARACTERISTIC	FT	
	N	PERCENT
Number of students graduating from your academic program with a master's degree since you have been employed in your current professional capacity.		
Less than 10	2	2.9
10 - 20	3	4.4
21 - 50	11	15.9
More than 50	53	76.8
Currently serving in administrative capacity in student affairs or academic affairs.		
Yes	32	42.7
No	43	57.3
If not currently, have ever served in administrative capacity in student affairs or academic affairs.		
Yes	37	49.3
No	38	50.7

TABLE 3 Continued

CHARACTERISTIC	FT	
	N	PERCENT
Current or previous administrative service		
Residence Halls/Housing	31	41.3
Student Activities/Unions	22	29.3
Financial Aid	10	13.3
Counseling Center	30	40.0
Career Planning/Placement	10	13.3
Dean of Students Office	32	42.7
Chief Student Affairs Officer	10	13.3
Academic Department Head	16	21.3
Chief Academic Officer	1	1.3

TABLE 4

MEAN SCORES FOR GROUPS BY CATEGORY FOR VARIABLES OF POSSESSION AND IMPORTANCE

Categories	Possession			Importance		
	FT[a]	DOH[b]	CSAO[c]	FT	DOH	CSAO
I. Goal Setting (1-4)	3.117 A	2.750 B	2.782 B	3.378	3.415	3.410
II. Consultation (5-8)	3.303 A	2.921 B	2.846 B	3.573	3.476	3.[illegible]
III. Communication (9-14)	3.020 A	2.692 B	2.744 B	3.341	3.287	3.412
IV. Assessment and Evaluation (15-22)	2.930 A	2.673 B	2.611 B	3.330	3.250	3.263
V. Environmental and Organizational Management (23-33)	2.934 A	2.630 B	2.667 B	3.348	3.342	3.413

Means with the same letter (A,B,C) are not significantly different (alpha = .05)

a N=75

b N=94

c N=91

TABLE 5

MEAN SCORES FOR GROUPS BY COMPETENCY FOR VARIABLES OF POSSESSION AND IMPORTANCE

Competencies	Possession			Importance		
	FT	DOH	CSAO	FT	DOH	CSAO
1. Write behavioral objectives	2.877	2.624	2.795	2.923	3.094	3.000
2. Identify and articulate institution's goals and policies to students	3.292 A	2.812 B	2.759 B	3.631	3.435	3.554
3. Teach students the consequences of their behavior	3.369 A	2.941 B	3.012 B	3.585 A	3.777 B	3.723 A,B
4. Engage in systematic planning	3.062 A	2.482 B	2.651 B	3.462	3.424	3.361
5. Recognize and use expertise of others	3.462 A	2.941 B	3.096 B	3.600	3.424	3.423
6. Facilitate group problem solving and group decision making	3.415 A	2.835 B	2.831 B	3.539	3.447	3.398
7. Facilitate staff development through in-service training.	3.123 A	2.894 B	2.663 C	3.446 A	3.494 A	3.193 B
8. Work effectively with a diversity of individual students and faculty	3.415 A	2.882 B	2.952 B	3.800 A	3.577 B	3.723 A
9. Analyze and write memos and reports	2.892 A	2.424 B	2.602 B	3.292	3.377	3.518
10. Make effective use of verbal and nonverbal skills in group presentations	3.354 A	2.835 B	2.855 B	3.677 A	3.471 B	3.458 B
11. Perceive and accurately interpret attitudes, beliefs, and needs of others	3.200 A	2.765 B	2.783 B	3.600	3.494	3.554
12. Represent student concerns to other campus groups	3.077 A	2.847 B	2.880 B	3.354 A	3.047 B	3.422 A
13. Recognize and define confidentiality practices and procedures	3.354 A	2.929 B	3.024 B	3.523	3.459	3.482
14. Determine usage of office management procedures (i.e. secretarial services, business machines operation, print and non-print media)	2.462 A	2.141 B	2.289 A,B	2.815	2.941	2.980

Means with the same letter (A,B,C) are not significantly different (alpha = .05)

TABLE 5 continued

Competencies	Possession			Importance		
	FT	DOH	CSAO	FT	DOH	CSAO
15. Assess student needs	3.185 A	2.741 B	2.783 B	3.585	3.482	3.518
16. Analyze and interpret program needs and requests	3.015 A	2.694 B	2.675 B	3.415	3.294	3.313
17. Design student programs based on student needs	3.139 A	2.777 B	2.735 B	3.554	3.424	3.506
18. Interpret and understand various evaluation strategies	2.831 A	2.447 B	2.446 B	3.185	3.024	3.036
19. Identify and understand various evaluation strategies	2.846 A	2.424 B	2.470 B	3.185	3.024	3.036
20. Design and implement a program to evaluate staff	2.615	2.518	2.386	3.077 A	3.282 B	3.072 A
21. Revise programs on the basis of evaluation data	2.815 A	2.529 B	2.506 B	3.277	3.235	3.289
22. Recognize and analyze interpersonal problems	3.202 A	2.965 B	2.916 B	3.554	3.447	3.482
23. Develop and administer a budget	2.539 A	1.894 B	2.169 C	3.185 A	2.918 B	3.277 A
24. Organize resources (people, material) to carry out program activities	3.139 A	2.741 B	2.819 B	3.446	3.435	3.615
25. Understand institutional mission, objectives, and expectations	3.000 A	2.459 B	2.627 B	3.631 A	3.271 B	3.566 A
26. Know and utilize effective decision making strategies	3.092 A	2.588 B	2.651 B	3.494	3.446	3.377
27. Accept authority and responsibility and delegate as appropriate	3.062 A	2.635 B	2.795 B	3.462	3.565	3.578
28. Identify and utilize available financial resources	2.785 A	2.353 B	2.518 B	3.339 A	3.035 B	3.241 A
29. Mediate conflict among students, campus, and/or community groups	3.046	2.906	2.819	3.369	3.329	3.410

Means with the same letter (A,B,C) are not significantly different (alpha = .05)

TABLE 5 continued

Competencies	Possession			Importance		
	FT	DOH	CSAO	FT	DOH	CSAO
30. Recognize and accept the ethical consequences of personal and professional behavior	3.600 A	2.777 B	3.036 C	3.754	3.635	3.627
31. Select, train, and supervise staff	2.892 A,B	3.000 B	2.735 A	3.339 A	3.741 B	3.337 A
32. Manage physical resources, and facilities	2.754 A	2.412 B	2.578 A,B	3.046	3.165	3.145
33. Adjudicate student conduct matters effectively	2.769	2.788	2.663	3.123 A	3.341 B	3.337 B

Means with the same letter (A,B,C) are not significantly different
(alpha = .05)